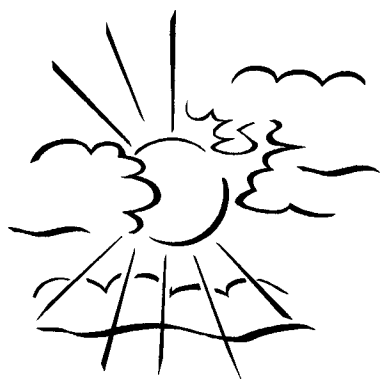


***Department
of
Human
Services***

Prepared by the
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*Important story at this spot

Articles in Today's Clips

Thursday, August 4, 2005

(Be sure to maximize your screen to read your clips)

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Healthier Michigan kids

The Grand Rapids Press

Thursday, August 04, 2005

Michigan is about average in a national report gauging the well-being of children. The document shows both that the state has work to do in some areas, but that children fare well in other categories despite Michigan's economic problems.

Kids Count, a project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, is a national and state-by-state effort to track the condition of children using health, social and economic wellness criteria from 2002-03. Overall Michigan received a ranking of 25, higher than most other Great Lakes states including Illinois at 28, Ohio 29 and Indiana 30. Minnesota and Wisconsin fared best, ranking third and 10th.

Michigan's worst category was infant mortality. The state ranked 38th, experiencing 8.1 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2002, exceeding the national average of seven. This is a persistent problem in the state and

in Grand Rapids, where the rate of infant mortality among black infants has been two-and-a-half to three times the rate for whites. In 2003, 4 percent of Michigan's children were living in households where no adult worked, nationwide it was 5 percent. The state's child poverty rate increased from 14 percent in 2000 to 16 percent in 2003, for a 25 ranking. Nationwide, it was 18 percent of children.

While an average record isn't cause to celebrate, neither is it a mark of failure. Among successes, for example, is a decline of 13 percent in teenage birth rates, for a rank of 14. Michigan is undergoing an economic transformation that will bring with it better times for the state's children. The Casey report helps to keep that goal in mind.

Child support bid tops \$45K

Thursday, August 04, 2005

SCOTT DAVIS THE SAGINAW NEWS

Pro basketball player Jason Richardson is claiming that the new child support request his former girlfriend is lobbing at him is out of bounds.

Way out of bounds.

Roshonda Jacqmain of Saginaw is seeking monthly support payments of \$45,426 -- a 10-fold increase over what she now receives for their 5-year-old daughter, Jaela T. Jacqmain.

Richardson, a Saginaw native and guard/forward for the Oakland-based Golden State Warriors, was in Saginaw County Probate Court this week to fight the request.

"It's totally outrageous," said Richard S. Victor, Richardson's Bloomfield Hills-based attorney.

"What is she going to do with the money? Jason Richardson is taking care of the child's needs and then some.

"A mother should not be taking advantage of the fact that she has a child ... and make money from it."

Brian S. Makaric, Roshonda Jacqmain's Saginaw Township-based attorney, strongly denied any inference that his client is seeking too much money.

"They were boyfriend and girlfriend for five years. It hurts her," Makaric said of the inference.

"They still have a relationship to the extent that they share a child together and they interact on a continual basis."

Serving as referee is Judge Patrick J. McGraw. He said he may issue a ruling in the case as early as next week.

The News was unable to reach Richardson or Jacqmain for comment.

CONTINUED

Child support bid tops \$45K

Page 2 of 3

Makaric said Jacqmain simply wants McGraw to follow a state formula in allocating child support; Makaric said it calls for \$45,426 monthly payments.

The recent child support request was prompted partly by Richardson's signing of a six-year contract with his team, boosting his salary next season to \$8.9 million, court records say.

That salary rises annually to \$14.4 million in 2010, records indicate. Citing the increase, Jacqmain is seeking \$73,048 in monthly child support payments that year.

"I'm not saying the child needs to ride in a luxury automobile or live in a (luxurious) home," Makaric said. "But the child should have advantages similar to a wealthy parent."

Victor, however, argues that state child support laws are designed only to meet the financial needs of the children. He said Richardson's monthly payment of \$4,000 now provides for Jaela's living expenses, which are no more than \$3,400 per month.

In addition, Richardson, 24, pays a court-ordered monthly amount of \$1,000, which is set aside in a conservatorship for the child.

Victor said Richardson bestows many gifts on his child beyond the support payments, including furniture and, some months, \$2,000 in clothing.

Victor said Richardson spends the summer and holidays with her, taking her to Disneyland and other places.

"This is a hands-on dad who takes her shopping for her school supplies," Victor said. "This is an actively involved dad who has not skirted his responsibility."

Jacqmain has disputed the amount of clothing bought for her child. Her attorney says Richardson sees his daughter periodically through the year when he is not playing but does not spend the whole summer with her.

Child support bid tops \$45K

Page 3 of 3

Victor said that state case laws support his argument that the child's needs -- not a rigid child support formula -- set the standard for support in high-income cases.

But Makaric argues that Michigan judges routinely use the state formula to establish relatively high child support payments in high-income cases.

Jacqmain now resides in a "modest" home in Saginaw with her daughter and is unemployed, Makaric said. She is a year from finishing a bachelor's degree at Davenport University with a focus on health information technology.

Jaela will attend St. Stephen Elementary School in Saginaw in the fall, court records say.

"It would put them on more of a level where there is not a disparity," Makaric said. "It's not a healthy environment for the child to live in -- to live one way with Dad and to live in a different economic-social environment with Mom."

Even though Jacqmain is seeking a higher payment now, Makaric said, her life has vastly improved only in recent years.

"She lived in a women's homeless shelter for almost two years, raising the child on her own while (Richardson) was still in college," Makaric said. "The child took her first steps in a homeless shelter. (Jacqmain) is now managing to get by."

In 2000, McGraw ordered Richardson to pay \$8 a week in child support for his daughter, and a year later, he signed a contract with the Golden State Warriors, starting with an annual salary of \$2.4 million.

In August 2001, McGraw increased the support payment to \$2,000 monthly, and later set it at \$4,000, plus the \$1,000 monthly payment to a conservatorship, court records say.

Scott Davis is a staff writer for The Saginaw News. You may reach him at 776-9665.

Michigan Report

August 3, 2005

GOVERNOR CALLS FOR TEXAS MAN'S EXTRADITION

Governor Jennifer Granholm on Wednesday started proceedings to extradite a Texas man charged with failing to pay more than \$170,000 in child support.

In December 1982, Michael James Runkel of Tyler, Texas, was ordered by the Mason County Circuit Court to pay \$183 a week for the support of his minor children. As of December 2004, he had not paid a cent, making his obligations total \$171,854. Police arrested Mr. Runkel in Texas in June and will face prosecution upon return to Michigan.

Failing to pay child support is a felony punishable by up to four years in prison and/or a \$2,000 fine. Ms. Granholm has requested the return of more than 100 parents for failure to pay child support as ordered by Michigan courts; after receiving extradition documents, officials can issue a warrant delivering the fugitive into the custody of Michigan authorities.

The state recently announced a new child support amnesty program, which takes effect October 1. Under the law, parents who owe past due support will have a 90-day window to avoid penalties, and penalties already initiated will be waived except for felony prosecutions or where a parent has already been arrested because of failure to pay. The amnesty program does not affect current support obligations.

MIRS
August 3, 2005

House Forms Medicaid Reform Task Force

Rep. Gary **NEWELL** (R-Saranac) will be heading a new task force to look at ways to reform the state's Medicaid system, House Speaker Craig **DeROCHE** (R-Novi) announced today.

"We must find efficiency in every aspect of our government," said DeRoche. "As costs continue to increase for recipients and those who provide care, we need to find proactive ways to reform Medicaid so the state, patients, providers and taxpayers benefit."

The task force will examine the following issues:

- Michigan's current Medicaid System;
- Technology and other efficiencies to save and secure Medicaid funding;
- Areas where patients need additional care that the state is currently not providing; and,
- Reforms to ensure the system remains viable for residents in the future.

"I'm pleased the speaker asked me to chair this critical task force," said Newell. "Reforming Medicaid will be no easy task, but I'm optimistic that we will be able to find effective solutions. We will take our time, not jump to any conclusions and listen to residents and medical professionals to get to the bottom of this."

Additional members will be named to the panel in the weeks to come.

Michigan Report

August 3, 2005

DE ROCHE CREATES MEDICAID TASK FORCE

A task force will examine ways to improve the Medicaid program, House Speaker Craig DeRoche (R-Novi) announced Wednesday.

Mr. DeRoche named Rep. Gary Newell (R-Saranac) to chair the task force, which will examine the following issues:

- Michigan's current Medicaid system
- Technology and other efficiencies to save and secure Medicaid funding
- Areas where patients need additional care that the state is currently not providing
- Reforms to ensure the system remains viable for residents in the future

"I'm pleased the speaker asked me to chair this critical task force," Mr. Newell said in a statement. "Reforming Medicaid will be no easy task, but I am optimistic that we will be able to find effective solutions. We will take our time, not jump to any conclusions and listen to residents and medical professionals to get to the bottom of this."

Mr. DeRoche said he would name additional task force members in the coming weeks.

August 3, 2005

STUDY FINDS 6.4% OF CHILDREN IN STATE UNINSURED

Some 161,061 children in Michigan, 6.4 percent of all children under the age of 18, do not have health insurance, a national study says, even though most those children could be helped by Medicaid or the State Children's Health Insurance Program.

Michigan has one of the smallest percentage of children uninsured, even though options are available to the them, the study from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation says. Vermont had the lowest percentage at 4.8 percent, while Texas had the highest at 21.2 percent.

Nationwide, according to the study, 8.4 million children did not have health insurance, even though health care coverage is available for most children. The study said some 70 percent of the uncovered children are available for at least one health plan that covers low-income children.

The study did find that since the federal government and states made efforts in the 1990s to reduce the number of children without coverage – through changes to Medicaid and the SCHIP programs, like MICHild – that the numbers of children without health insurance had dropped from 1998 to 2003 from 13 percent to 10 percent.

In contrast, the numbers of those children's parents without health insurance has increased in that time frame. The study did not cite percentages but said the total number of parents without coverage increased from 11.19 million to 12.42 million during that time.

The study also found that Hispanic children were the most likely to not have any health insurance, with 20 percent in 2003 without coverage. In contrast, only 6 percent of white children were uninsured and 9 percent of black children were uninsured.

The study also found that one-third of the uninsured children got no medical coverage during the previous year while 88 percent of those children who are insured sought medical coverage.

August 4, 2005

Free clinic set to open

Low income people without coverage

By SHERI MCWHIRTER

Record-Eagle staff writer

GRAYLING - A free clinic for low income people without medical insurance or Medicaid coverage will open in the Mercy Professional Building.

The Au Sable Free Clinic will provide health care to people who meet income requirements from Crawford, Roscommon, Oscoda and Montmorency counties. The \$75,000 budget to run the clinic in its first year is backed by donations and grants. Doctors, nurses and nurse assistants all volunteer their time.

Dr. Lisa Harrington, from Grayling Family Practice, has lived and worked in the community eight years and decided the nonprofit clinic would benefit the area. She said many people need regular medical care, but don't have access to doctors.

Betty Martella, a retired nurse and the clinic's acting manager, said the clinic likely will see between 50 and 75 patients per month to start, but officials expect the client list to grow.

"People are already calling," Martella said.

Census figures from 2000 show that about 25 percent of the four-county population falls beneath federal poverty levels and seven percent doesn't have any medical coverage - nearly 4,100 people.

The free clinic will operate from 5 to 8 p.m. on Thursdays from the office building at 201 Meadows Drive in Grayling and could open as early as Aug. 11 or Aug. 18.

Preventative care will be a primary service, Martella said, where people can seek treatment for a variety of problems, such as infections, high blood pressure and diabetes. Mercy Hospital is donating basic laboratory costs and X-ray services, and limited prescription drugs also will be available.

Martella said clinic officials will hire a part-time manager. The clinic is modeled after a similar free facility in Cadillac. Several grants are pending for the Au Sable Free Clinic, which also accepts donations.

Harrington, the clinic's medical director, said the community project needs more volunteer physicians. Many local medical specialists have agreed to take free referrals from the clinic.

For more information, call (989) 348-0419.

Thursday, August 4, 2005

Juvenile center gets new director

Kentucky candidate agrees to take top job at Macomb facility for troubled youths.

By Jim Lynch / The Detroit News

MOUNT CLEMENS -- Macomb County officials have finally found a new top official for the Juvenile Justice Center.

After two rejections and nearly a year of searching, the county's latest top candidate has agreed to take on the superintendent's role at the detention center.

The center, which is being expanded, provides detention and shelter services for troubled youth.

"We're very excited to have him on board," said Nancy White, chairwoman of the Macomb County Board of Commissioners. "This has been a long process for us."

The new superintendent is Charles Allan Seidelman, 55, who most recently served in that role at McCracken Regional Juvenile Detention Center in Paducah, Kentucky.

Seidelman said he plans to start his Macomb County job Sept. 6.

In April, the former deputy director of the Wayne County Juvenile Justice Center declined to take the position, which prompted commissioners to embark on a new candidate search.

The candidate, Diane Ranson-McGhee, cited the length of time required for her to earn a pension as a reason for turning down the job.

Last month, Douglas Nitz, a former youth home administrator from Kalamazoo, turned down the position.

Reached at his home in Kentucky, Seidelman said, "It's exciting. It's a very big project to be a part of -- 190 youths being handled at a time is a lot."

The full-time administrator's position has been empty since the departure of Ron Gekiere last summer amid concerns about training and licensing.

The home has become the focal point of controversy, with members of the Macomb Ministerial Alliance monitoring the process. Greg Murray, a spokesman for the alliance said: "We believe Mr. Seidelman is impeccably credentialed for the job and we look forward to working with him to resolve issues at the home."

Seidelman is a 1973 graduate of Western Kentucky University where he earned a bachelor's degree in sociology.

Earlier, he was the youth services center director for Bartholomew County Circuit Court in Columbus, Ind. from 1992 to 1999.

You can reach Jim Lynch at (586) 468-0520 or jlynch@detnews.com.

INBRIEF

From Telegram staff reports

Adrian

2nd Kids Closet to open



Submitted photo

Jarrett Patterson from Hudson makes a presentation Tuesday to the board of directors at the Adrian Training School. Jarrett, who started Kids Closet in 2003 at Hudson High School, was one of 10 national winners of the Prudential Spirit of Community Awards in Washington D.C in April. He is opening a second Kids Closet at the Adrian Training School and can be reached for clothing referrals at kidscloset03@hotmail.com.

Woman accused of raping teen accepts plea deal

Thursday, August 4, 2005

By Margaret Harding Times Writer

In a move that surprised prosecutors, a Bay City woman accused of raping her boyfriend's 14-year-old son pleaded no contest to second-degree criminal sexual conduct on Tuesday.

Amy M. Dyjak, 25, allegedly assaulted the teen while she lived with his father at an apartment at 1501 Center Ave.

Bay County Prosecutor Joseph K. Sheeran said he expected the defense to ask for an adjournment, but Dyjak decided to enter the plea.

As part of the plea, Dyjak has agreed to terminate the parental rights to a child she conceived with the teen, Sheeran said.

The results of a paternity test showed the victim is the father of the baby boy. The 1-year-old is living with the victim's father, according to court documents.

However, the victim, now 16 and living with his mother, is interested in gaining custody of his child.

Sheeran said he intends to petition the court to terminate Dyjak's parental rights today. He also intends to set aside acknowledgment of paternity by the victim's father, to pave the road for the victim to take custody.

"He's the father and it's not uncommon nowadays for teenagers to father or give birth to a child," Sheeran said. "He has a good support system in place. Their plan is that his mother would have a role in raising the child."

Dyjak was charged with four counts of first-degree criminal sexual conduct, three counts of second-degree criminal sexual conduct and three counts of delivery of marijuana. Originally, she was charged with first-degree criminal sexual conduct and second-degree criminal sexual conduct.

Sheeran said he anticipates all other charges will be officially dropped at the sentencing on Sept. 19.

"We dismissed those and she'd be convicted of this one felony," Sheeran said.

Dyjak is expected to serve up to a year in jail, Sheeran said.

She has been lodged in the Bay County Jail since December and would get credit for her time already served, Sheeran said.

The abrupt end to the case in front of Bay County Circuit Judge Kenneth W. Schmidt was a welcome one, Sheeran said.

"It's an unusual case and I know that the victim and his family are pleased with the resolution," Sheeran said.

Margaret Harding is a staff writer for The Times. She can be reached at 894-9675 or by e-mail at mharding@bc-times.com.

The Grand Rapids Press

August 4, 2005

Protect children

I, too was outraged by the senseless death of beautiful Aiyana Cisneros ("Weeks after abuse probe, 'blunt force' kills girl, 2," Press, July 20). Where was the Department of Human Services? Obviously her bruise was alarming enough to have the hospital call the department in the first place. I feel it was complete negligence on their part, not to pay a follow-up visit and interview everyone in depth.

It is also obvious where the mother's loyalty was placed. She was not there for her daughter, and it is hard for me to understand her priorities. Also obvious, her stepmother loved and cared for her deeply, by the loving description of the darling little girl. What could a 2-year-old have done to deserve a death of that magnitude and cruelty? Did she do this to herself? There are plenty of questions to be answered.

I also feel the employee of the Social Services needs to be accountable. The child was in danger and they failed to recognize it. We will hear plenty of excuses, such as too big a caseload, not enough time, not enough help, etc. All children are our future. Protect them and love them at all cost.

KATHY Van ZANTEN/Byron Center

Thursday, August 4, 2005

Michigan to revamp foster care mission A new initiative aims to keep kids in touch with their birth parents and in their hometowns.

By Maureen Feighan / The Detroit News

Michigan plans to revamp its approach to foster care to include more family input and to minimize disruption for kids who fall into the system, the state's department of human services announced Wednesday.

Rather than removing kids from their communities and schools, the state unveiled a new program called the Family to Family initiative that aims to keep foster kids rooted in their home communities as much as possible, place them with family members or close family friends and involve neutral "facilitators" who will work with birth parents and social workers to decide what's best for the kids.

"It's a whole new approach to foster care and to child welfare," said Marianne Udow, director of the Department of Human Services. "It shifts the focus in child welfare to early intervention with the goal to help families and bring the community in as a partner to help families."

Started as a pilot in parts of Wayne County in 2002, the initiative was so successful the human services department now wants to implement it throughout the state over the next three years, though implementation will depend on state funding. Every county in Metro Detroit should be on line by year-end.

Parent Nancy Colon of Detroit applauds the new approach. After losing her five kids a year and a half ago because of an ex-boyfriend who kept breaking into her home, Colon watched as her kids were shuffled to five different temporary foster homes.

Colon said she had no support and didn't know how to navigate the system.

Then she found out about the Family to Family pilot program through a foster parent and was teamed up with a facilitator. He helped her work with the foster parents taking care of her kids, arrange meetings with them every weekend, and even find a job and place to live.

"He was somebody who had my back when nobody else would listen," said Colon, who now plans to get her kids back on Aug. 17.

Michigan currently has more than 19,000 children in foster care, which Udow hopes to reduce by 20 percent by the year 2009. Estimates from the human services department show the new initiative could cost as much as \$5.6 million to implement, though Udow believes it will save money in the long run by keeping more children out of foster care.

Family to Family Initiative

- Increase family involvement and investment in developing safety and service plans for children.
 - Utilize extended family, kin and community-based resources to support family and monitor safety of children.
 - Keep children in the community, their school and with siblings.
 - Establish facilitators to work with foster parents, birth parents and department of human services staff to develop best plan for children.
- Source: Michigan Department of Human Services*

The biggest expense will come from hiring facilitators who will work as intermediaries between case workers, foster parents and families with children in foster care. Currently, only a case manager or social worker determines the best course for a family.

The state also plans to work with community organizations, churches and other groups to recruit more foster families to keep kids who come into the system in their home communities as much as possible. Their first choice in placing foster children is with family members or family friends, Udow said.

Udow said the more stability the state can provide to foster children now, the more benefits it will have in the long run.

"We absolutely believe that the more stability we can provide now, the much more likely kids are to stay in school, get a degree and be productive members of society," she said.

You can reach Maureen Feighan at (313) 222-2690 or mfeighan@detnews.com.

Michigan Report

August 3, 2005

DHS CHANGES FOSTER CARE APPROACH

The Department of Human Services is implementing a child welfare reform initiative in every county to place foster children in stable homes after the program was successfully started in Wayne County.

The initiative, Family to Family, has also been implemented in several other counties. The goal is to place children with one permanent and stable family until they can return to their real family or are released for adoption, and DHS officials say the approach ensures both birth and foster parents are involved in the decision-making process concerning at-risk children.

For more information, visit the DHS website at www.michigan.gov/dhs.

Meth adds to foster-care shortage

Thursday, August 4, 2005

Special to the Kalamazoo Gazette

CENTREVILLE -- The on-call caseworker's phone rings at 2 a.m., and the scenario has become all too predictable.

Police have just busted another methamphetamine lab, and three children have been removed from the potentially explosive, lethal home.

As she hurriedly dresses to pick up the children, the Child Protective Services worker from the St. Joseph County Department of Human Services begins mentally checking off potential foster-care placements for the kids who will arrive with only the clothes they are wearing.

The combination of escalating meth busts and a dwindling number of licensed foster-care homes is leaving Human Services workers scrambling to find homes for displaced kids.

Without new licensed foster-care providers in St. Joseph County, children suffering abuse or neglect may have to be placed outside the county, and siblings face the possibility of being separated at a time when family ties are already endangered.

With 45, St. Joseph County has only two-thirds the number of licensed foster-care homes it needs to respond to the rising need, according to Kathy Lake, St. Joseph County child services supervisor. The number of active foster homes has been as high as 60, but officials say retirements, relocations, "burnout" and foster parents who adopt their wards have reduced the pool.

"Meth children" are not the only relative newcomers to foster care. In recent months, St. Joseph County caseworkers have had to find foster homes for five teenage girls, ages 13 to 18, and their infants. The young women were removed from their homes because of neglect or because incest or sexual abuse resulted in their pregnancies.

Cary Russell, the county's foster-care-licensing worker, has begun a recruiting drive aimed at adding at least 30 new homes countywide. To do that, Russell is fielding phone calls and providing information packets to people who may have an interest in foster parenting. According to Russell, the information comes with no strings attached.

"Calling doesn't obligate anyone," Russell said. "We have information and we can answer questions."

Foster parenting is not for everyone, Human Services officials acknowledge. At \$14.25-\$17.59 a day, providers aren't thinking profit when they take in children like those who hoard food because they have been kept hungry by abusive parents. In some cases, foster parents may have an edge in adopting a child in their care.

CONTINUED

Meth adds to foster-care shortage

But there are no guarantees when children are dropped off, because biological parents have a year to show they can be fit.

Page 2 of 2

According to Lake, foster parents agree to become licensed because they know the toddler at the door had to leave behind his ``blankie" at an apartment labeled toxic because meth was produced there. Or they agree to take only teenagers who are destined to fail without someone who will get them to school, set rules and care about them.

``It's not easy to ask people to give full affection to children who may be temporary," Lake said.

``Our longest fostering family has been with us 35 years. We have foster parents in their 70s, and the youngest was 21, the most mature person I have ever met."

Potential foster parents must take six hours of training before they can even apply to become licensed. ``We want them to have some idea what they're getting into," Russell said.

Applicants then take another six hours of instruction before children are placed with them.

Meanwhile, licensing requires everyone in the home to get a routine physical, the water and septic systems must pass inspection, the house or apartment must meet minimum standards and anyone 18 or older undergoes a criminal background check. Foster parents are not allowed to spank placed children, an issue that deters some potential providers, Lake said.

Providers can decline placements, and they may specify the ages of children they will accept.

Of the 167 children now in county-supervised foster care, about half are placed with relatives and most are in St. Joseph County. Russell said licensing more homes will help Human Services keep siblings together and aid in allowing displaced children to remain in their school districts.

For more information about becoming a licensed foster care provider or to attend a pre-application training, contact Russell at (269) 467-1284 or RussellC3@michigan.gov.

Michigan Report

August 3, 2005

STATE IMPROVES FOOD STAMP ACCURACY

Michigan was able to avoid another \$1.5 million penalty by meeting federal food benefit standards for fiscal year 2004-05, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture waived \$3.4 million in penalties from previous years based on Michigan's improvement.

The USDA said Michigan's food assistance error rate – the combined rate of overpayments and underpayments – was 7.19 percent last fiscal year, down from 14.1 percent in 2002 and more than 17 percent in FY 1998-99. USDA also recognized six counties that give more than \$10 million in benefits annually for managing between 94 and 98 percent accuracy rates.

Michigan's food assistance program helps more than one million families and individuals in the state, and USDA pays for all of the program benefits. Sixtyfive percent of those who qualified for assistance received it in 2002, USDA reported, and is ranked 10th overall in the nation for families served.



JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING

MARIANNE UDOW
DIRECTOR

News Release

**Contact: Stepheni Schlinker or
Maureen Sorbet (517) 373-7394**

Michigan improves accuracy in Food Assistance Program *Averts federal penalties and protects vulnerable families and individuals*

August 3, 2005

Already a leader among states in ensuring that needy families have access to federal food benefits, Michigan has improved service delivery in the Food Assistance Program and avoided more than \$3 million in federal penalties, according to a new federal report.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) released food assistance accuracy data for fiscal year (FY) 2004. Based on the improvement, the USDA waived \$3.4 million in penalties incurred but not yet paid from earlier fiscal years and Michigan averted another \$1.5 million penalty by meeting federal standards.

"This administration is committed to protecting our families, children and elderly citizens," said Governor Jennifer M. Granholm. "This report shows we are headed in the right direction, but we won't stop working to improve this critical service for the people of Michigan."

The USDA reported Michigan's Food Assistance error rate – the combined rate of overpayments and underpayments in test cases – was 7.19 percent during FY 2004. This is down from 11.1 percent the year before, 14.1 percent in 2002 and more than 17 percent during 1998 and 1999. Michigan incurred federal penalties in prior years for not meeting federal standards.

Of the Michigan counties issuing \$10 million in benefits annually, the USDA recognized six- Berrien, Genesee, Saginaw, Kent, Ingham and Muskegon - for achieving program accuracy rates over 94 percent and as high as 98 percent.

"This improvement is the result of dedicated efforts by our employees and managers," said Marianne Udow, director of the Department of Human Services. "Delivering benefits efficiently and accurately means more families, children, and vulnerable adults have food on their tables."

Michigan's Food Assistance Program supplements the food purchasing power of more than one million low-income individuals and families across the state. The U.S. Department of Agriculture pays for 100 percent of program benefits. Department of Human Services' staff persons statewide determine eligibility for applicants.

In Michigan, it is estimated that more than 65 percent of those who qualify for food assistance received it during FY 2002 (the most recent year in the report). This exceeds the national average by 11 points (54

percent). The USDA said earlier this year that Michigan has the largest percentage of families participating in its Food Assistance Program of all states with more than one million persons qualifying for assistance, and is ranked 10th overall in the nation.

Of the other large states, Illinois was estimated to have 59 percent participation, Ohio 56 percent, Pennsylvania 55 percent, Georgia 54 percent and New York 50 percent. California, Texas, North Carolina and Florida all had less than half of qualified persons receiving benefits from the program, according to USDA estimates.

The comparative figures were announced in "Reaching Those In Need: State Food Stamp Participation Rates in 2002" published in March 2005 by Mathematica Policy Research for the Food and Nutrition Service.

In June 2005 there were 1,063,550 persons receiving benefits and almost \$93 million in benefits were issued that month. More than \$901 million in benefits were issued during FY 2004 in Michigan.

For more information go to www.michigan.gov/dhs

ACCESS benefits from interim site

Thursday, August 04, 2005

By Gary Morrison The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- A move to a new location, even temporarily, is saving All County Churches Emergency Support System, or ACCESS, money better spent on programs and jobs.

ACCESS is a network of churches, individuals and community members working together to meet needs in Kent County. Formed 24 years ago, ACCESS supports and coordinates 100 food pantries in Kent County that serve more than 5,500 households each month.

The chance to move from its office at 38 W. Fulton to The Urban Center at 355 Sheldon SE was too good to pass up.

"The move saves us \$1,500 a month," said ACCESS Program Director Marsha DeHollander. "It means we can continue without having to cut our programs or our staff."

The new space on the second floor was used as a manufacturing and training facility by Goodwill Industries, DeHollander said. It became available when Goodwill moved its manufacturing operation to its 3035 Prairie St. SW facility in Grandville.

Goodwill is providing the space for the shared cost of utilities, DeHollander said. It also gives ACCESS employees the opportunity to meet many of Goodwill's workers and administrators, who are still in the building.

"This gives us a chance to learn more about Goodwill's programs," DeHollander said. "When we visit area churches to talk about ACCESS, we will also be able to tell people about the wonderful programs available through Goodwill."

The move to The Urban Center is only temporary, DeHollander said. Goodwill is in the process of developing a location where a number of nonprofit groups can operate.

"That will take about two years," DeHollander said. "But for now, we are thankful for a place that will allow us to continue what we are doing for the community."

AWARE names new executive director

Thursday, August 04, 2005

By Pat Rombyer prombyer@citpat.com -- 768-4924

A new executive director with an extensive background in treating victims of domestic violence and sexual assault has been hired at the AWARE Shelter.

Nicole Hall, 37, comes to Jackson from Turning Point, a domestic assault shelter in Macomb County, where she was director of shelter services.

She'll replace Shirley Pascal, who is retiring Aug. 31 after almost 10 years. AWARE offers housing, counseling and legal advocacy to domestic assault and rape victims.

"We're very sad to see Shirley go, but at the same time, we're excited about Nicole coming on board," said Nancy Iseler, president of the AWARE board.

Hall was one of about 60 applicants for the job.

Pascal said the agency was looking for someone who "understands AWARE's mission, understands anti-violence and has experience in administration, financial management and fund-raising."

Hall has garnered all that and more since graduating from the University of Michigan. As a student, she got involved with a sexual assault prevention group and knew upon graduation that was her destiny.

She packed her bags and drove across country to Los Angeles for her first post-graduation job at a rape crisis center. Discouraged about the cost of living and missing her family, she returned to the Midwest and took a job in Chicago at the Anti-Violence Project and at an HIV-AIDS organization.

She came back to the University of Michigan and earned dual master's degrees in public health and social work. She has also worked as a grants director and director of programs for other nonprofits.

"I'll be looking for ways to streamline some of our processes," she said, adding that she plans to continue and build on the agency's successful programs.

"When I can, I'll free up time to spend with clients," she said. "I'd like as much free time with the residents as I can, just to sit and chat with them."

Occasionally, she'll think about some of those she helped in the past -- the 12-year-old who was brutally sexually assaulted; the teenage boy who was sexually assaulted by an older benefactor who took him in after his parents kicked him out; and the woman who was beaten and stalked by her husband who was relentless in tracking her down.

Pascal will leave a legacy when she departs.

It was during her tenure that the agency made its move to its location on W. Michigan Avenue.

Also under her leadership, the annual home tour, a significant fund-raiser, was launched; the agency's transitional housing was expanded; the Domestic Assault Coordinating Council and the Sexual Assault Task Force were created; and the children's programs were expanded.

A legal advocacy program to help clients work their way through the court system was added.

"It was hard to consider leaving, but it gets easier every day," Pascal said. "Change is good for an organization."

It's going to be a very cold winter for far too many

The Muskegon Chronicle

Wednesday, August 03, 2005

We're all sweating it out this week as the heat and drought drag on. But the big chill has already set in among those who understand just how cold this forthcoming winter is going to be for far too many of our state's poorest citizens.

In a nutshell, Michigan's emergency reserve fund for helping out low-income residents -- some of them military families -- has hit empty due to skyrocketing energy costs. Gone in July was the \$117 million from the Low-Income Energy Assistance Fund that comes from the federal government annually the previous October. This is the first time since the 1980s that the money has disappeared before it is scheduled to be replenished in October.

What that means is, with the money now gone because of increased need, next year's allotment may not be enough to forestall utility shut-offs this coming fall. So the real effect of this summer's bills for increased fan and air conditioner usage during this long, hot summer will be felt in the depths of winter. "We don't have a lot of tricks in our bag," said Michigan Department of Human Services Director Marianne Udow. "We are extremely concerned about this."

The Low-Income Energy Assistance Fund money is tapped by nearly a million families annually to keep up with their bills to avoid fall shutoffs. Utilities generally act in the fall and spring to shut off non-paying customers because of prohibitions against terminating service when lives may be at stake.

Currently, there's a lot of political posturing going on in Lansing over how to best balance the state's budget. Republican legislative leaders have rejected Gov. Jennifer Granholm's revenue-neutral, pro-manufacturing initiative in favor of their own tax relief plan that would, among other things, cut many desperately poor families off the state welfare rolls. Meanwhile, taxes would be slashed and spending would remain virtually constant.

The plight of the poor has not exactly taken front and center in this debate. Yet the warning signs are already in place during this heat wave that a very cold winter awaits those who can least afford it. When the tax breaks are handed out, will there be anything left over for them? Even the proverbial lump of coal?

Summer tutor is child of migrants

Thursday, August 04, 2005

By Ron Cammel The Grand Rapids Press

KENT CITY -- Michael Velasquez believes the routine moving of migrant workers puts a strain on their children's education and causes them to miss out on steady friendships and sports. That is why he decided to move one more time from Texas and help teach in the migrant summer program here, which he attended for most of his childhood.

"I've come full circle, so I feel I'm giving back to the community and to the program," the Comstock Park resident said while watching migrant children play dodge ball.

"It feels very gratifying. I like it, seeing students achieve."

The federally funded program in Kent City Community Schools draws about 200 migrant children from five school districts.

Classes from preschool through high school help students make up for work they may have missed while traveling between the South and here as parents switch seasonal work on farms.

High school students can make up credits.

"The barrier for me was going back and forth to different schools," said Velasquez, 29, whose parents recently settled in Texas after working farm fields in Michigan and Texas for many years.

He said schools do not match curriculum at the same grade levels, so he always was catching up.

"I'm sure it's the same for these kids. ... It affected me enough that I wanted to break that lifestyle," Velasquez said, adding his parents did not want him working in fields, either. "I did it so many years, and I just got sick of it because it wasn't going to get me anywhere."

He attended college in Texas, and plans to work toward an education degree locally.

CONTINUED

Summer tutor is child of migrants

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Velasquez said the migrant program provides opportunities for migrant children to maintain their education, keep contact with friends and discover community resources.

The program includes field trips, regular swimming at the high school and library programs, as well as breakfast, lunch and afternoon snack. Federal money covers visits by dentists, hearing screeners and book giveaways.

"It's a lot of fun for the kids," third-grade teacher Stacy Serba said. "It really helps them fill in the gaps during the school year because they're always moving. ... It's too bad it's only six weeks."

Serba works on regular curriculum, but said it is difficult meeting all educational needs. Since attendance is not mandatory for most, students come and go, and they are at different levels.

Student Jesse Quirin, 13, said the program is light enough for summertime.

"It's like a fun school. It doesn't feel like I'm going to school all year," Jesse said.

Lali Jaimes, 9, agreed she had enough playtime, saying some of the work, such as math, is enjoyable, too.

"I like it a lot," Lali said.

Velasquez said the program used to be bigger with art and music, before funds were cut.

Still, he sees children making progress in their education. For instance, some Spanish-speaking students improve in English, he said.

"I've lived what they're going through," he said.

"I can be a positive influence. If I can do it, you can."

Church gets personal with pantry

Thursday, August 04, 2005

By Ron Cammel

The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- The Rev. Mary Sepanik talked about the numbers, the process and the need involved in a new personal-care products pantry at Eagle's Nest Church.

Then volunteer Judy Mathias jumped in: "The other part is what no one sees, which is how happy we are to do this."

"Yes," replied Sepanik. "We talk about how God uses diapers and toilet tissue for ministry."

The church, at 540 Leonard St. NW, has been distributing soap, deodorant, razors, toothpaste and other items to low-income people on the last Tuesday of each month since November.

Barb Garza worked with Mathias one day last week bagging items in a small storeroom.

Meanwhile, 107 families filled a church hall, enjoying homemade soup and drinks while awaiting the goods.

"I think this is real important," Garza said, putting shampoo in a grocery bag. "I benefit from it, too, because I'm on food stamps."

Garza is a primary caregiver for her husband, who is disabled. They receive Social Security.

"I could spend money out of that for these things, but that would be \$20 or \$30 a month I don't have for other things. Food stamps don't cover all of this," she said.

Sepanik, an associate pastor of the nondenominational storefront church, says a mix of young and old use the service -- single moms, grandparents taking care of grandchildren, unemployed people.

"Sometimes we know the reason they're here, sometimes we don't," she said.

Because of the showing last week, the church is asking only people from the 49504 ZIP code to use the free service.

Previously, the church handled an average of 80 families a month with about \$1,125 worth of items.

The money comes from the church itself and donations. Families have been coming from as far as Greenville and Cedar Springs, Sepanik said.

Last month, the pantry ran out of many items.

"We know of no one else doing this on this large of a scale," she said, adding the pantry started simply because the 13-year-old church saw a need.

"A lot of people aren't comfortable in a church," Sepanik said. "They might be more comfortable here."

August 4, 2005

Author leads workshop on pulling people out of poverty

About 1,200 are registered for today's seminar

By VANESSA McCRAY
Record-Eagle staff writer

TRAVERSE CITY - Ruby Payne, a noted author and expert on poverty and its causes, will lead a workshop on how to pull people out of poverty.

Today's training seminar at New Hope Community Church in Williamsburg is sponsored by the Traverse City Area Chamber of Commerce and the Poverty Reduction Initiative, a local group committed to reducing poverty in the surrounding five-county area.

"(Payne) is the national authority on the culture of poverty," said James Rowlett, chairman of the initiative.

Payne is co-author of "Bridges Out of Poverty: Strategies for Professionals and Communities." The workshop will teach social service workers, educators, business owners, community leaders and other participants "how to work with people that are in poverty and how to help them come out of poverty," Rowlett said.

Chamber president Doug Luciani said Payne will speak about the "culture of poverty," an understanding needed in order for a community to make "long-term, systemic changes."

The chamber is also involved in the initiative, whose goal is to reduce area poverty by 25 percent by 2010. Luciani said reducing poverty is linked to business issues such as affordable housing, wages and health care.

The seminar will discuss ways the community "can not just treat the symptoms of poverty in Traverse City, but address the cause of poverty," Luciani said.

Organizers said response to the event has been solid, with participants registered from throughout the state.

About 1,200 people registered for the event that runs from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Those interested in attending the seminar may register today at the door. The cost is \$40.

Op-Ed Contributor

The Message Thing

By JIM WALLIS

The New York Times

Published: August 4, 2005

SINCE the 2004 election, there has been much soul-searching and hand-wringing, especially among Democrats, about how to "frame" political messages. The loss to George W. Bush was painful enough, but the Republicans' post-election claims of mandate, and their triumphal promises to relegate the Democrats to permanent minority status, left political liberals in a state of panic.

So the minority party has been searching, some would say desperately, for the right "narrative": the best story line, metaphors, even magic words to bring back electoral success. The operative term among Democratic politicians and strategists has become "framing." How to tell the story has become more important than the story itself. And that could be a bigger mistake for the Democrats than the ones they made during the election.

Language is clearly important in politics, but the message remains more important than the messaging. In the interests of full disclosure, let me note that I have been talking to the Democrats about both. But I believe that first, you must get your message straight. What are your best ideas, and what are you for-as opposed to what you're against in the other party's message? Only when you answer those questions can you figure out how to present your message to the American people.

Because the Republicans, with the help of the religious right, have captured the language of values and religion (narrowly conceived as only abortion and gay marriage), the Democrats have also been asking how to "take back the faith." But that means far more than throwing a few Bible verses into policy discussions, offering candidates some good lines from famous hymns, or teaching them how to clap at the right times in black churches. Democrats need to focus on the content of religious convictions and the values that underlie them.

The discussion that shapes our political future should be one about moral values, but the questions to ask are these: Whose values? Which values? And how broadly and deeply will our political values be defined? Democrats must offer new ideas and a fresh agenda, rather than linguistic strategies to sell an old set of ideologies and interest group demands.

To be specific, I offer five areas in which the Democrats should change their message and then their messaging.

First, somebody must lead on the issue of **poverty**, and right now neither party is doing so. The Democrats assume the poverty issue belongs to them, but with the exception of John Edwards in his 2004 campaign, they haven't mustered the gumption to oppose a government that habitually favors the wealthy over everyone else. Democrats need new policies to offer the 36 million Americans, including **13 million children**, who live below the poverty line, as well as the 9.8 million families one recent study identified as "working hard but falling short." In fact, the Democrats should draw a line in the sand when it comes to wartime tax cuts for the wealthy, rising deficits, and the slashing of **programs for low-income families and children**. They need proposals that combine to create a "living family income" for wage-earners, as well as a platform of "fair trade," as opposed to just free trade, in the global economy. Such proposals would cause a break with many of the Democrats' powerful corporate sponsors, but they would open the way for a truly progressive economic agenda. Many Americans, including religious voters who see poverty as a compelling issue of conscience, desire such a platform.

Similarly, a growing number of American Christians speak of the environment as a religious concern - one of stewardship of God's creation. The National Association of Evangelicals recently called global warming a faith issue. But Republicans consistently choose oil and gas interests over a cleaner world. The Democrats need to call for the reversal of these priorities. They must insist that private interests should never obstruct our country's path to a cleaner and more efficient energy future, let alone hold our foreign policy hostage to the dictates of repressive regimes in the Middle East.

Op-Ed Contributor

The Message Thing

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On the issues that Republicans have turned into election-winning "wedges," Democrats will win back "values voters" only with fresh ideas. Abortion is one such case. Democrats need to think past catchphrases, like "a woman's right to choose," or the alternative, "safe, legal and rare." More than 1 million abortions are performed every year in this country. The Democrats should set forth proposals that aim to reduce that number by at least half. Such a campaign could emphasize adoption reform, health care, and child care; combating teenage pregnancy and sexual abuse; **improving poor and working women's incomes**; and supporting reasonable restrictions on abortion, like parental notification for minors (with necessary legal protections against parental abuse). Such a program could help create some much-needed common ground. As for "family values," the Democrats can become the truly pro-family party by supporting parents in doing the most important and difficult job in America: raising children. They need to adopt serious pro-family policies, including some that **defend children against Hollywood sleaze and Internet pornography**. That's an issue that has come to be identified with the religious right. But when I say in public lectures that being a parent is now a countercultural activity, I've found that liberal and conservative parents agree. Rather than fighting over gay marriage, the Democrats must show that it is indeed possible to be "pro-family" and in favor of gay civil rights at the same time.

Finally, on national security, Democrats should argue that the safety of the United States depends on the credibility of its international leadership. We can secure that credibility in Iraq only when we renounce any claim to oil or future military bases - something Democrats should advocate as the first step toward bringing other countries to our side. While Republicans have argued that international institutions are too weak to be relied upon in the age of terrorism, Democrats should suggest reforming them, creating a real International Criminal Court with an enforcement body, for example, as well as an international force capable of intervening in places like Darfur. Stronger American leadership in reducing global poverty would also go a long way toward improving the country's image around the world.

Until Democrats are willing to be honest about the need for new social policy and compelling political vision, they will never get the message right. Find the vision first, and the language will follow.